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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000940

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PROTESTS - FURTHER SIGNS OF OPPOSITION  
DESPERATION

REF: TBILISI 937

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: A small group of protesters blocked the main road to the Tbilisi International Airport in front of the new Ministry of Internal Affairs building for about 45 minutes on May 19. Other protest leaders addressed a small crowd in front of Parliament. Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way) explained that May 26 (Georgian Independence Day) would be a new April 9, and that the process was moving towards its final stages. Zourabichvili said that she explained the truth about the current political situation in Georgia to Javier Solana who had "been misinformed". Zourabichvili added the EU's active intervention would be necessary in the upcoming days, while she dismissed the United States as not being able to help solve the impasse. Nino Burjanadze (Democratic Movement - United Georgia) announced that she would sue President Saakashvili for his alleged remarks about her serving Russia's interests during the May 11 meeting with opposition leaders. Saakashvili made another public statement calling for calm and stability while criticizing the non-parliamentary opposition for paying protesters. Meanwhile, Speaker Bakradze told the Ambassador that he remained willing to meet with non-parliamentary opposition leaders and that he was still in regular contact with both Levan Gachechiladze and Irakli Alasania (Alliance).  
End Summary.

12. (C) Comment: Whether threatening to sue the President, calling for direct EU intervention into internal politics, or being forced to "educate" another misinformed diplomat, the non-parliamentary opposition appears to be increasingly frustrated and desperate. Comments, both public and private, indicate the non-parliamentary opposition generally realizes that it is losing its already limited bargaining leverage and at least some leaders are searching for a solution to its largely self-inflicted predicament. For its part, the GoG appears to remain willing to let the non-parliamentary opposition save some face and achieve some meaningful concessions. However, Saakashvili's second day of critical remarks about the protests and its organizers may indicate that the GoG is preparing the political field to move ahead on its own sooner rather than later with its reform agenda, presumably together with the parliamentary opposition. End Comment.

Protesters Block Airport Road - Nino and Salome Express Frustration

13. (C) A group of several hundred protesters led by Gachechiladze, Burjanadze, David Gamkrelidze (Alliance - New Rights), and Zviad Dzidziguri (Conservatives) blocked a portion of the major highway connecting Tbilisi to the international airport and all parts east. The blockade lasted about 45 minutes and was organized to show that the MoIA "has become a symbol of human rights violations and violence in Georgia" according to Gamkrelidze. Journalists interviewed irate motorists caught in the blockade. Despite his recent comments that blocking roads was

counterproductive, Gamkrelidze dismissed criticism of the irate drivers saying "other roads to the airport were not blocked." Gachechiladze later announced that he would join his brother in organizing non-parliamentary opposition concerts in Batumi and then rally Georgians to march from the coast to Tbilisi in order to join a May 26 protest rally. Non-parliamentary opposition leaders placed a small number of cells in the center of the western Georgian town of Zugdidi, but did not use them to block any roads. Qbut did not use them to block any roads.

14. (C) Burjanadze announced that she would sue President Saakashvili for damaging her "dignity and business reputation". Burjanadze said that the basis for her law suit were private remarks Saakashvili made to the non-parliamentary opposition during their May 11 meeting. Saakashvili allegedly said that Burjanadze was serving Russia's interests by engaging in protests. Zourabichvili expressed her frustration of having to educate another misinformed diplomat -- this time, the EU's Javier Solana. Zourabichvili said that Solana had "wrong information" and blamed the Georgian Embassy and the President's PR specialists for providing misinformation. Zourabichvili said that "it required serious effort to explain that the opposition is not split and that the opposition is not irresponsible." Zourabichvili expressed her opinion that the process was nearing its last stages (though she did not speculate about the outcome). In a dig at the United States, Zourabichvili said that only the EU could help solve the impasse as "we are asking our friends in the EU to more actively influence internal political processes in Georgia now, as the U.S. has already said that it is not prepared to do so and directly handed over the Caucasus and Ukraine to

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the E.U."

Misha Goes on Offensive - Bakradze/GoG Still Willing to Talk

15. (C) While visiting Poti May 19, Saakashvili again criticized the non-parliamentary opposition's threats to block major roads, saying their tactics hurt average Georgians. Saakashvili announced publicly that the GoG would not allow the non-parliamentary opposition to block major roads, ports, or railways. Saakashvili called for calm and dialogue saying that stability was a key government responsibility. Saakashvili said that whatever "personal ambitions one might have, one should not humiliate a citizen by paying 40 or 50 lari to spend a night in a cage." Saakashvili said he understood and did not blame those who are accepting the payments, and offered a bit of political advice saying that if the non-parliamentary opposition spent its money to truly help those in need rather than on their personal ambitions they would have much greater political support. Speaker David Bakradze told the Ambassador that he remained in regular contact with both Gachechiladze and Alasania. Bakradze said that he was happy to speak to the non-parliamentary opposition, and that the GoG's offer for dialogue was still open.

TEFFT